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7
SHAPING UP
Stepping up your routine

2
EDITOR'S NOTE
Passing the torch

HEALTH WIRE
Blood thinners • Protein and exercise • Redheads

3
UPFRONT
Aspirin and cancer

6
MEDICAL MATTERS
Therapy vs. drugs for depression

8
SPECIAL REPORT
How to eat enough fruits and veggies

10
HEALTH-CARE SAVVY
Easing shoulder injuries

11
OFFICE VISIT
Remember me, Doc?

12
ON YOUR MIND
Shingles and strokes
• Water drinking

Are the top-selling vitamins worth taking?

When the Institute of Medicine announced last fall that it was changing the amount of vitamin D it recommends most adults get each day from 200 international units (IU) to 600 IU, some critics said the increase was too modest. They cited studies associating higher vitamin D levels with several disease-preventing benefits, in addition to its well-documented role in protecting bones.

But sometimes a conservative approach is justified. For example, it wasn't that long ago that researchers thought folic-acid supplements might protect the heart or prevent cancer, a promise that clinical trials have failed to confirm. Studies of antioxidant supplements have been equally disappointing.

In an analysis of 67 trials involving about 230,000 patients, for example, the pills had no beneficial effect on mortality. And three antioxidant vitamins—A, E, and beta-carotene—actually increased the risk of death.

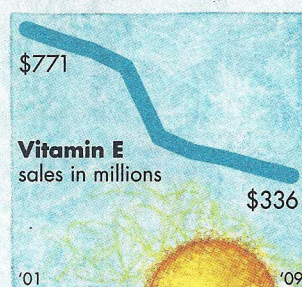
Even the good old multivitamin, far and away the supplement purchased most often in the U.S., has virtually no evidence to show that it improves the average person's health.

Supplements have their place, but “many of the claims are overblown and unsubstantiated,” says JoAnn Manson, M.D., chief of preventive medicine at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston and a member of the institute's committee on vitamin D. “People are often given the impression that supplements work

[Continued on Page 4]

Another decade, another vitamin: The rise and fall of D and E

Vitamin D sales soared between 2001 and 2009, a period during which several studies linked it to various health benefits. Many people can get ample D from the sun and such foods as fatty fish. News that vitamin E pills might increase the risk of illness and death, meanwhile, probably didn't help sales.



Source: Nutrition Business Journal

